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The Nation Still Ponders Its Destiny in Recalling the Great Struggle That Ended in Triumph and Tragedy One Hundred Years Ago:

The War and Mr. Lincoln Once More

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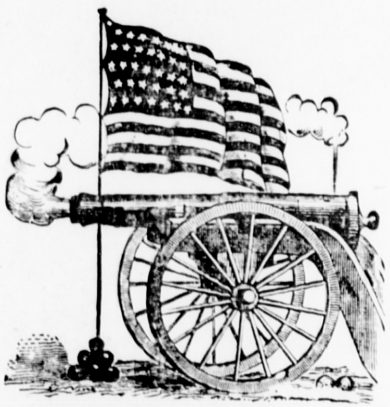
APR 29 1965

By William B. Catton

DURING the past four years, Americans — or those among us who set store by such things — have been hard at work celebrating the Centennial of the Civil War. Civic groups, patriotic organizations (blue or gray), local chowder and marching societies, war buffs, and accessible scholars have had a perfect field day with the crowded calendar of events that ran from Sumter to Appomattox. It is doubtful that the smallest skirmish or remotest military maneuver escaped their attention. Every battle has been marked, according to the arrangement committee's resources of cash, imagination, zeal, and rabidity, with varying assortments of parades, pageants, odes, costumed reenactments, and oratory — the last being, of course, copious and indispensable. Americans seldom do things by halves.

We probably overdid it, but it may have needed doing. Ritual observances, even when exaggeration makes them ludicrous, are a society's formal way of touching base with its heritage, of reaffirming a bond with people and deeds and events that still matter. For America the Civil War continues to matter, whether our ancestors were actually present or whether they came later. The legacy is timeless, and runs from coast to coast. What the nation was and is and might become were partly forged in that furnace, for better or worse. And instinctively we know it, even if there are overtones and implications that we sometimes forget.

And so, in commemoration, we have summoned forth once more all the ghosts and echoes of our strange trial by combat. Once again we have dwelt vicariously amid the watchfires of a hundred circling camps and listened to the compelling dissonance of the guns and bugles. Even to a generation that has almost entirely outgrown the notion that there can be romance in war, parts of the spectacle quickened the pulse and brought a lump to the throat. We were watching a tragedy, uniquely our own, whose plot and ending we knew. Though we might smile or wince at the quality of the commemoration, we could seldom fail to respond in some way to the quality of what was being commemorated.



Courtesy N. Y. Public Library

The very place names still resound with an odd blend of tragic grandeur and rustic homeliness, at once the martial thunder of armies locked in historic battle and the twangy sing-song of a station agent calling the stops from an old railroad timetable. The names on our land have their own magic, even when, as in most cases, nothing ever happened there.

But things happened, a century ago, at Ball's Bluff and Bull Run, at Donelson, Shiloh, Malvern Hill, Pea Ridge, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Stone's River, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Yellow Tavern, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Winchester, Petersburg . . . and points south and west. Things happened, too, on bits and pieces of terrain or beside man-made structures that accidentally became parts of battlefields, and many of these connote something of the horror that made them landmarks: Devil's Den, Little Round Top, Bloody Angle, Sunken Road, the Wilderness, and a bucolic array of so-and-so's house and such-and-such church and numberless fields and woods and orchards — names unknown beyond the local maps until war's huge paw swiped bloodily across them.

The drama and color — for war sometimes has them, interleaved among the pain and agony — took pale form once again as solemn invocations to this or that portion of those honored dead conjured up visions: flame and gunsmoke over Charleston harbor in that gray April dawn of 1861; dour Jackson standing like a stone wall at First Manassas; laughing Jeb Stuart, gaily riding his plumes and his troopers clear around a Union army; A. P. Hill's division arriving after a 25-mile forced march in time to save Lee's right wing at Antiet-

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am; Confederates cheering the Northern army's gallant, suicidal charges up the well-entrenched heights opposite Fredericksburg; the succinct message of a hitherto unknown general announcing that his only terms were unconditional surrender.

The picture-book splendor of George Pickett's five thousand veterans dressing their ranks as they marched into the hail of Northern fire on the third day at Gettysburg; Farragut's warships running the rebel batteries at Vicksburg, first sign that the Father of Waters would once again flow unvexed to the sea; the columns of Jackson and Early and Sheridan maneuvering in turn across the green-and-gold valley of the Shenandoah; C. S. S. **Alabama** at large on the sea lanes while C. S. S. **Virginia**, ex-**Merrimac**, wheezed out of Norfolk to challenge the blockading fleet and symbolize the end of an era at sea.

Still the parade went on: Federal soldiers spontaneously storming an impregnable position along Missionary Ridge and putting a veteran Southern army to rout; Robert E. Lee astride Traveler while battle smoke and rebel yells swirled across the Virginia landscape; William Tecumseh Sherman branding his name and the meaning of war in a swath across Georgia; and finally the sound of Sheridan's bugles and the sight of Federal infantry at Appomattox telling Lee that the enemy had outreached him and the end was at hand.

The end came promptly, and with it, a century later, an end to the observances. The Civil War Centennial was virtually over with the ceremony at Appomattox on April 9. One or two events were still to be commemorated, but the observance of Lee's surrender marked the real finish. Not much of importance remained to be done, one hundred years ago, after that quiet, final confrontation between the courtly Virginian, already a legend, whose lean ragged remnant of an army had been brought to bay at last, and the firm-jawed commander with the lieutenant-general's stars pinned to his dusty private's uniform, agreeing on terms of peace and parole while the endless blue columns coiled about this remote crossroad in south-central Virginia, strangely quiet in their hour of victory, soon to stand and snap unbidden to present arms as the beaten Army of Northern Virginia filed between the Union ranks to stack their arms and furl their battle-flags for the last time.

THERE was drama in all of this, most assuredly. No society need apologize for wanting to invoke such memories. Yet there is danger that the patriotic speeches and old paintings and colorful tableaux will conspire to preserve a two-dimensional memory of the Civil War. Safely insulated from the recent memorial services was the conflict's brutal, seamy underside. The price of valor and gallantry came high. Part of the bill was rendered in the form of looted homes, burned cities, blackened countryside, profiteering, corruption, the sale of faulty material to the army, the withholding of needed supplies, rioting, mob violence, influence peddling, arbitrary arrests, executions for treason or dereliction of duty — all of the ugliness that leers and skulks in the wreckage of war's train. Part of the price was a crop of hatred and bitterness that sprouted with the first casualty lists and bore fruit long after the guns were silent.

From Harper's Weekly

"LONG ABRAHAM LINCOLN A LITTLE LONGER:" Harper's Weekly rejoices after the November, 1864, election returns.

Gallantry also cost some six hundred thousand lives. Bear in mind that this was more than the nation suffered in the Revolutionary, 1812, Mexican, Spanish-American, Korean, and first and second World Wars **combined**. What these dead Civil War youths and their unborn children might have contributed to the nation in the restless era after Appomattox will never be known, but no society can ever be quite the same after losing every tenth male of military age.

We got more for this fearsome price, of course, than a record of valor and pageantry. Everyone knows this, even if its import is frequently overlooked. The Union survived and slavery perished, instead of the other way around. There can be honest debate as to whether a terrible war was necessary to accomplish these ends, none at all as to whether the ends were good. They were worth what they cost, and more, so long as we do not make the mistake of forgetting how enormous the cost was or what the fruits of victory really meant.

This generation, in fact, cannot afford to forget **any** of the lessons of the Civil War. For we have promises to keep, and miles to go before we sleep, and to say that we would rather not, or that we are tired of hearing about it, is totally irrelevant. A deferred commitment has come due. The most significant portion of the war's vast legacy has been bequeathed to us intact, and it is a stunner: we are to administer its unfinished business. The option of deferring this legacy, which our ancestors blithely exercised for nearly a century, has permanently expired. As Harry Truman put it, the buck stops here. A choice still exists, but the one we no longer have is that of postponement, of closing our eyes in hopes that the problem will go away. It won't.

Perhaps that is lesson number one from the Civil War generation. Their dilemma wouldn't go away, either, although nearly everyone fervently wanted it to. That dilemma, in brief, was the

future of chattel slavery as a national institution. Sooner or later, a republic with the traditions and aspirations symbolized by the Declaration of Independence was going to have to face the appalling, blasphemous incongruity posed by this institution. Early Americans did not deny this incongruity, but slavery's periodic intrusions upon the national conscience — like a firebell in the night, as a worried Jefferson put it — were easier to ignore than answer. (So are the first twinges of a bad tooth, or the early swelling of a cancer.)

SLAVERY grew especially convenient to ignore when it became an inseparable adjunct of the booming cotton industry, and hence of the entire American economy, in the half-century preceding the Civil War. Thanks largely to cotton, which created an important joint partnership among British textile manufacturers, Yankee merchants, and Southern planters, the complex system of property in man represented, by 1860, an investment — land and equipment aside — worth well over two billion dollars, with corresponding legal title to the life and labor of three and one half million human beings.

Cotton was king, and many a fortune could be made in the king's service on both sides of the Atlantic, but this was more justification than cause for the nation's reluctance to take a long, hard look at its peculiar institution. Important though cotton was to American prosperity and the world market, few people genuinely believed that the whole elaborate process — the plants blossoming in endless fields beneath the Southern sun, the gins and the presses, the bales stocked along river levees and seaside quays, the laden sidewheelers churning downstream toward New Orleans or Mobile, the tall square riggers beating up the coast from the cotton ports to Manhattan or Boston, the transatlantic packets, the bank drafts on cotton circulating across the western world, the whir of spindles in Lancashire and along the Merrimac, the brimming drygoods counters in every European shop and frontier trading post — that all of this would somehow cease to function if the fieldhand who picked and ginned and baled and stacked much of the world's cotton suddenly stopped being a slave. People often tried to argue this way, but it did not take vast discernment to see that slavery, as a **labor** system, was convenience rather than necessity.

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Always, sooner or later, you came back to those three and a half million human beings. They had dark skins, and their background was a continent sunk in barbarism — at least in the opinion of an era that tended to draw easy assumptions, confuse cause and effect, and mistake the farthest outer threshold of scientific knowledge for its inner sanctum. These dark-skinned folk were sometimes loyal and even lovable, but fundamentally the white man's inferior, consigned by the Almighty to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. Slavery seemed an eminently logical answer to the problem of containing large numbers of a people whom white society regarded as alien, half savage, and totally unassimilable.

But **people,** all the same. Nineteenth-century versions of science and Scripture could both be cited to support claims that the Negro was inferior, but theories that denied his humanity were neither reputable nor comforting; they flew in the face of too much evidence. Rights that the revolutionary generation had pronounced inalienable and truths it had called self-evident had a way of intruding at about this point Americans read more of the Bible, too, than those obscure Old Testament passages that slavery apologists were fond of quoting; most people knew that the message of Christianity pointed in another direction.

The American conscience, North and South, could never really rest easy with slavery. Since it was difficult to face the alternatives,* people dodged the problem few occasions, and despite vociferous protest from a handful of abolitionists, they succeeded pretty well until the eighteen-forties. In Allan Nevins' apt metaphor, "men walked softly not to rouse the sleeping tiger." Unfortunately, the issue had a way of injecting itself into every topic on the national agenda. It also had a way of stirring the emotions, and before long men not only forgot to walk softly; they rattled sticks back and forth along the bars of the cage.

White Americans were too imbued with moral purpose to ignore the slavery problem and too imbued with racism to solve it properly or even face it intelligently. It proved far easier, once people could no longer evade the question, simply to quarrel. The quarrels were vehement, genuine, and bitter, but always somewhat off the subject. They ranged over questions of territorial expansion, war, diplomacy, the right of free speech, and even bread-and-butter items like a transcontinental railroad, harbor improvements, tariffs, and the price of homesteads. They revolved around the right of slavery in federal terrorities, the right or duty of Congress to legislate on the subject, and finally (less removed from slavery than they appear) the nature of the federal union, the meaning of the Constitution, the location of sovereignty, and the right of a state to secede.

ONLY by these circuitous ways could this generation blunder toward a showdown with slavery, and when the showdown finally came it was ostensibly over something else. Accidents of climate, geography, and economic specialization had isolated slavery in one section of the country. Because the long array of quarrels had challenged vested interests and touched men in sensitive areas, variously bound up with feelings of security and well-being and differing concepts of patriotism, liberty, morality, and race, the quarrels generated suspicion and hatred and above all fear. Demagogues arose to prey upon this. Fear of slavery and its implications produced a powerful now political party in the North; fear of this party drove the deep South into rebellion; resentment born of fear united the North in an effort to crush it. And the war came.

It was a war for union, then, at the outset. Northerners did not take up arms after Sumter in order to free the slaves. But the conflict had not progressed very far before slavery got in the way, and as the Union war effort picked up speed it simply ran over the peculiar institution. Slavery dissolved wherever the Federal armies appeared, and one did not have to be an abolitionist in order to feel that returning these eager fugitives to their masters was both inhumane and impractical. Northerners soon saw the logic in what was happening, and in the midst of the war for Union — half by accident, half reluctantly, with a dawning sense that what they were doing was right but with little awareness of what would follow — they put an end to slavery. The consequences, by and large, they ducked. And this became a habit for almost a century, even as ducking slavery had been a habit before 1845.

Nobody likes facing this kind of thing. There was nothing particularly noble about the decision to destroy slavery. Until the harsh logic of war put a new face on the matter, only a few really wanted to do it, and these few had been mobbed and scorned and shrieked at for a generation — for no other reason than that they had insisted upon telling the rest of society, often without much tact, what had to be done. People

*One alternative, seized by a few during the early nineteenth century with an odd blend of cynicism, evangelical zeal, and wishful thinking, was colonization: the idea that it would be possible to ship several hundred thousand American Negroes to Africa. A few thousand were actually sent, during forty years or so of spasmodic effort—about as many as were born into slavery in one year. Aside from the fact that very few Negroes wanted to go, many of them dating their American ancestry as far back as most white families and having not the remotest interest in Africa, colonization was a blind delusion from the outset. The country totally lacked the required financial resources, unity of sentiment, and willingness to sacrifice.

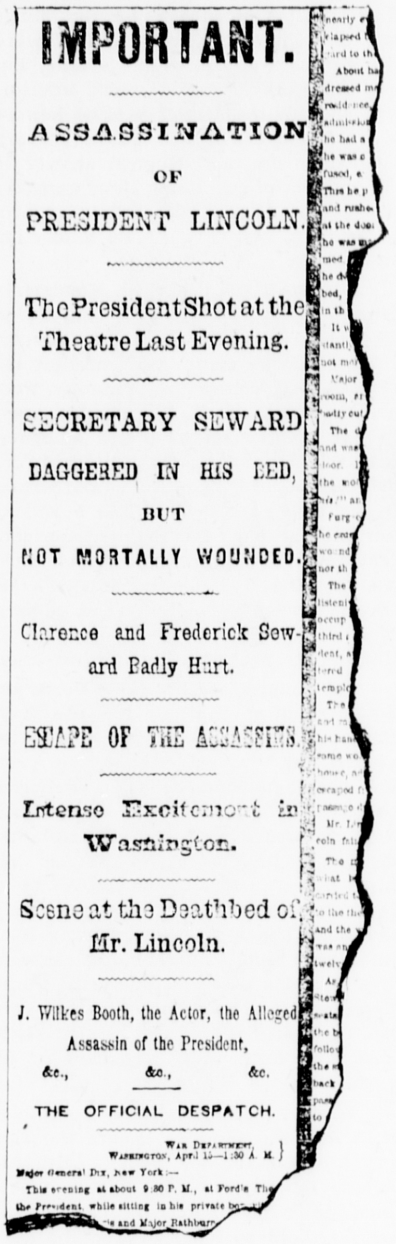
like this are seldom popular, because what has to be done is seldom very pleasant.

But somehow, after an incredible amount of violence and partly by accident, it got done anyway. The echoes of the guns died away, and after Appomattox the nation turned wearily to the tasks of restoration. Within a week, it experienced one more event to commemorate — a bizarre, grisly capstone to the whole tragic business, a kind of symbolic reminder that the noblest and ugliest aspects of the war were two sides of the same coin.

No self respecting novelist or playwright would dare concoct a climax as melodramatic and implausible as that scene in Ford's Theater on the night of April 14, 1865: the buildup of whispered conspiracies and night rides, the muffled figure sliding into the presidential box, the shot ringing out, the assassin leaping grotesquely onto the stage brandishing his pistol and mouthing his absurd Latin phrase before posturing off to begin his doomed flight, the screams and excitement, the lank form stretched limply on a bed, and the life inexorably ebbing away through the long night while cabinet members and politicians watched beside. The war had claimed one final victim, and the legend of Abraham Lincoln suddenly blossomed with the lilacs as the funeral train left its smoke trail and sounded its soft rhythmic dirge across the spring landscape on the way home to Illinois.

LINCOLN was bound to become a legend. Martyrdom froze the image like a photograph in his hour of triumph, with the Union secure and the bondsman free. Because most Americans, then and thereafter, approved these results and recognized the slain President as the major instrument in achieving both, he quickly joined Washington at the very center of the American pantheon, revered and quoted and honored and studied until, over the years, the legend became more real than the man. The endless anecdotes and recurrent tributes have raised his pedestal higher and higher, until those who file solemnly past can do little but stare upward — properly awed, perhaps, but seeing little save shadowy outlines looming above the inscriptions on the base. Lincoln became a god, with a Greek temple in Washington and likenesses everywhere—on a coin, a stamp, a bill, and portraits on the wall of nearly every schoolroom, public building, and lawyer's office in the United States. Such a figure is easy to worship but difficult to know.

There are two pitfalls here. One is that we will take Lincoln for granted, accepting the fact of his greatness without pondering the reasons for it, con-



IMPORTANT.

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

The President Shot at the Theatre Last Evening.

SECRETARY SEWARD DAGGERED IN HIS BED, BUT NOT MORTALLY WOUNDED.

Clarence and Frederick Seward Badly Hurt.

ESCAPE OF THE ASSASSINS.

Intense Excitement in Washington.

Scene at the Deathbed of Mr. Lincoln.

J. Wilkes Booth, the Actor, the Alleged Assassin of the President,

&c., &c., &c.

THE OFFICIAL DESPATCH.

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, April 15—1:30 A. M.

Major General Dix, New York:—

This evening at about 9.30 P. M., at Ford's Th... the President while sitting in his private bo... and Major Rathbun...

Headlines from the New York Herald of April, 15, 1865, tell most of the dettails of the Lincoln assassination.

tent to genuflect absent-mindedly whenever his name is mentioned. The other, in a generation that distrusts commitment and regards cynical irreverence as a sign of independent thought, is that Lincoln will become little more than a big stale cliche — the sort of ponderous sacred cow that offers an inviting target for lampoons and Menckenesque shafts.

Lincoln would not have minded the ridicule, of course. His eye for a joke never dimmed when he was the butt, and he would not only join in the laughter but heartily approve any process by which hero worship was cut down to size. Humor is a reminder that even the noblest of a nation's greats are only men after all.

Even off his pedestal, however, Lincoln stood tall and cast a long shadow, and it helps to remember just why this is so. When we start laughing at him there is always a danger that we will end by laughing at the things he believed in. If this ever happens, we are in real trouble.

Peeling away all of the stereotypes and stock images that surround Abraham Lincoln will not make him any easier to understand. For one thing, most of the stereotypes are true. It is certainly possible to overglorify him, but the stuff of the legend is real enough; it was not necessary to invent anything. His fabled sense of humor and love of funny stories —on and off color—were genuine. He liked them for their own sake, and also as a way of illustrating a point or avoiding an unequivocal answer. He did in fact enjoy swapping yarns and laughing with the boys around the cracker barrel. The earlier images, formed long before his death and even before his presidency, were equally true—the gangling youth who read voraciously, taught himself law, split rails, and captivated everyone in his adopted home of New Salem by taking part in a village debating society and beating the town bully in a frontier-style wrestling match.

The loftier side of the legend is also accurate. The quality perhaps closer to the core of Lincoln than anything else was compassion, which does much to explain the breadth and permanence of his appeal. "Malice toward none" was more than a catch phrase. Lincoln rose to prominence in an age of hate, and the hatred insisted upon finding human targets. People hated slaveowners, or Negroes, or rebels, or Yankees, or abolitionists, or Republicans, or Democrats, or foreigners, or various combinations of these. Lincoln hated no one, although the provocation was frequently great (and he was not above getting exasperated). His detestation of slavery was abiding, but it did not extend to Southerners: "they are no more than we would be in their situation." Magnanimity, humility, and a kind heart really were among his virtues, even as the schoolbooks say.

GRANT all of this; what then of the man? He is as hard to locate as ever. Essentially he was unknowable. Probably everyone is, but Lincoln seems the more so because we can see so much of him and remain just as far away. No American has been studied harder, analyzed oftener, or subjected to as keen and many-sided a scrutiny, from contemporaries and historians alike. We

have an embarrassing wealth of testimony. Yet he had a way of exhibiting only one part of his personality at a time, and an observer was apt to see this single facet often enough to become convinced that it was the "real" Lincoln. Our trouble here is that no two of his contemporaries ever saw quite the same facet.

One is reduced, finally, to truisms that are accurate enough but not really helpful; some are no more than dodges. He was extraordinarily complex, which is an overused word that happens to fit beautifully here, but complexity is the lock rather than the key to his character. We can also proclaim, again with more truth than light, that the whole of Lincoln was greater than the sum of the parts. Certainly he was as full of paradox as any human who ever walked; he fits Winston Churchill's classic definition of Russia as a riddle wrapped within an enigma inside a mystery.

Consider just a few of the contradictions. He shared Jefferson's conviction that mental exercise strengthened the mind as directly as physical exercise developed the muscles; his reasoning, in court and correspondence and speeches and state papers, usually had a clear, precise logic that attested to his mental sharpness. Yet the man who admired the mathematical symmetry of Euclid and believed in the power of human reason was also a mystic, a visionary, a believer in dreams. The chuckling, joke-telling Lincoln was afflicted with a chronic melancholy that often "dripped from him as he walked," as one friend wrote, and occasionally almost unbalanced him. The folksy, gregarious Lincoln was basically a loner who often preferred solitude and kept his friendships at arm's length. There was a remoteness about him. Even his closest friends called him Lincoln rather than Abe and admitted that they did not really know him at all.

And finally, although the compassion and tender-hearted warmth were altogether genuine, anyone who interpreted these milder virtues as a sign of softness was making a huge mistake. The brooding, patient thinker could act fast and act hard, and the man of compassion could show a streak of something very like ruthlessness and move toward his goal with all the compassion of a steamroller. He was also, first and last, a political manipulator who knew how to cut corners and was not above using federal troops to guarantee election victories in key districts.

MUCH is made, rightly, of the fact that he was one of the few in this anxiety-ridden era who could fight without hating. Yet it was essentially Lincoln who formulated and carried through the policy of unconditional surrender; he must bear final responsibility for the kind of total war that Sherman made in Georgia and Sheridan in the Valley and Grant in Virginia. No "hater" could have prosecuted the unrelenting Union effort with more vigor and determination. He ran for re-election in 1864 pledged to victory regardless of cost, and a large portion of that appalling casualty list might have been saved if Abraham Lincoln had not insisted, from Sumter right on through to Appomattox, upon going for broke.

Taking him off his pedestal—undeifying him, as it were—is not overly difficult. Whether this brings us appreciably closer to Lincoln the man is another question. Like most great leaders, Lincoln can be all things to all people. He wrote and said a good deal, and it is not hard to find what you want to see; wherever there is Scripture there are devils to quote it, and some of Lincoln's champions are an embarrassment.* Try as we might, the "real Lincoln" will always remain shrouded in mystery.

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There is less excuse for fuzzy-mindedness on the subject of why he remains important, or stands so imperturbably on that pedestal despite our most irreverent shafts. The vital elements in his philosophy are clear enough. He had something compelling to say to this generation. And we ignore him at our peril, for neither the Civil War nor the entire American experiment—which is still very much in process—can be understood without him. (This discussion is less concerned with taking Lincoln off his pedestal than with emphasizing the real reasons for his being there.)

Politics is by all odds the best place to start. This probably strikes a sour note, since most Americans regard politics with mingled suspicion and distaste. Lincoln was a consummate master of the political art, and his measure simply cannot be taken in any other context. Politics was his natural habitat, his milieu, his profession—and he was a professional, to the innermost depth of his being. He thought, spoke, planned, and operated within the political framwork. As a result he fully understood the value of compromise, pressure, parliamentary maneuver, party loyalty, delay, logrolling, saying less than one meant, and a range of other tactics—everything, in short, that people have more or less vaguely in mind when they refer to politics as sordid and not very nice.

Well, it **is** sordid and not very nice, at least in part. It is also, and more importantly, the process by which all of the diverse and often conflicting goals and aspirations of individuals and groups within a society are reconciled, compromised, adjusted, and translated from ideas into programs and from programs into action. It is every bit as full of maneuver and wheeling-and-dealing as critics claim, and for an excellent reason: it is necessarily concerned not merely with human ideals and aspirations but with human greed and ambition.

LINCOLN understood all of this. He knew and respected the infinite uses of political power, and operated the cumbersome mechanism of party machinery with a keen sense of balance. He saw man **whole** — self-seeker and visionary, schemer and dreamer. A society's highest aspirations must always be reconciled with its baser drives; the American dream itself is an irreducible alloy of unlimited benevolence and unabashed self-interest. An idealist who never lost touch with reality, he embraced neither the illusion of human perfectibility nor a cynical surrender to human limitation. And he recognized that the noblest as well as the basest of goals could only be translated into action through the medium of politics. In America, lofty aspirations and unlofty political process were allies, uneasy but inseparable.

As a politician, Lincoln appreciated the virtues of patience, tact, moderation, and the art of the possible. These are real virtues, often in short supply in this country because we prefer to do things in a hurry; our ambitions and our words tend to be immoderate, and we have never really liked admitting that anything is impossible. The do-it-now, do-it-big, and do-it-all approach has been a source of strength as well as weakness, of course. But we have long passed the easy adolescent years of our national development, when we could laugh at caution and push blindly ahead. In the taut, intricate era of the late twentieth century, Lincolnesque maturity and restraint are indispensable.

Yet even Lincoln's storied moderation has its qualifiers, and they are important. It is customary, in calling the roll of his virtues, to stress this moderation as a welcome contrast to the misguided, excessive zeal of the abolitionists and Radical Republicans—who were,

*The Communists have long adopted him, and on the other side he can be quoted out of context to give aid and comfort to racists. A careful reading of Lincoln on the subject of the Negro indicates that he was color blind, but more acutely aware than most antislavery men of the depth and virulence of the average white man's antipathy to the black man in 19th century America. His statements to white and black audiences alike often made due allowance for this, but Lincoln shared no appreciable amount of the prejudice of which he spoke. Communists, Negrophobes, and champions of the radical right must distort Lincoln out of all recognition in order to use him—but then, distortion is the stock in trade of all three groups.

by this view, primarily responsible for the war and the later evils of Reconstruction because they insisted upon destroying slavery and admitting the Negro to citizenship before he or the society were ready. Lincoln, on the other hand, knew better. He said in 1854 that "with all earthly power" he would not know what to do about slavery, recognizing the complexity and explosive nature of the problem. He did not intend to force the issue, or go faster than the glacial shifts in public opinion would permit. And he insisted, in 1861, upon defining the Northern war aim as restoration of the Union rather than destruction of slavery. (It is this line of reasoning that has enabled the South to join the rest of the nation in making Lincoln a hero. Latter-day exponents of a go-slow or do-nothing civil rights policy are fond of claiming him on the same grounds.)

THERE are elements of truth here, but at bottom they rest upon a misconception of what Lincoln's moderation really meant. On the subject of slavery, the moderate approach would only begin to operate after a national consensus had been reached. To Lincoln, slavery was an undiluted moral wrong that must someday be extinguished. He recognized the virture in doing this slowly, providing time for all of the necessary social, economic, and psychological adjustments. But the nation would have to accept the premise that slavery was doomed. Only then, he reasoned, could it find the wisest means to this end. A problem cannot be solved until it is faced.

The important part of Lincoln's prewar career, from 1854 to 1860, was devoted to making his position on slavery clear and ultimately making it the program of the Republican Party. The specific controversy at issue in the eighteen-fifties was slavery's power to expand into federal territories, which the South claimed as a constitutional right. Lincoln was a leading opponent of this view, on the explicit theory—which Southern leaders shared—that once slavery was contained within its present area the process of setting it on the road to ultimate extinction could begin.

Lincoln, recognizing necessity, wanted this process to be slow, but he wanted it to begin **right away**—and here he was as uncompromising and immoderate as the most radical abolitionist. The Republican Party took this stance, essentially, in 1860, and Southern leaders who demanded secession rather than accept a Republican president had read the cards correctly: Lincoln and his party would never let slavery expand. If it could not expand, it would someday die. Someday might be a long way off, but only the time would henceforth be debatable, not the fact. And by 1860 the somewhat paranoid condition of Southern leadership could not abide this notion; they were prepared to destroy the Union before admitting even the abstract possibility that slavery's days might be numbered. On this issue, which was central to the whole controversy, secessionists were fundamentally right in seeing little difference between the man from Illinois and the hard core of abolitionism.

NOR would Lincoln permit compromise when his containment policy actually did produce secession and the threat of civil war. The one compromise proposal with any hope of acceptance in the winter of 1860-61 was that of Senator Crittenden of Kentucky, which would have reopened the door to slavery expansion. Lincoln flatly refused to let his party accept Crittenden's plan: "on this point hold firm, as with a chain of steel," he wrote. The party complied, and the last hope of averting secession was gone.

Lincoln's antislavery convictions actually underlay his devotion to the Union, and the war he avowedly waged in order to preserve it was less removed from the slavery controversy than it appears. Lincoln appreciated, perhaps more keenly than the people he led, just why the Union was worth saving. He regarded it as an experiment in democracy, and the keystone in the democratic arch was the concept of individual freedom. If the Union collapsed you could never do much about slavery, while if the Union survived right-thinking men could untimately bring an end to slavery by peaceable means. (When the war began to destroy slavery on its own, he moved to take advantage of this — as an unforeseen wartime bonus, and as a means of hastening the Confederate collapse.) In any case, liberty and Union were to Lincoln, as they had been to Daniel Webster, one and inseparable.

* * * * * *

Lincoln's concept of freedom was comprehensive, absolute, and uncompromising. Here his message for our generation reaches clear to the marrow. Freedom — meaning that complex of values connoted by the "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" passage in the Declaration of Independence — has to be extended across the board, or it has no meaning at all. Deny it to one person or group and you endanger everyone's possession of it, for the logic which justifies the denial of freedom to anyone is a sword that cuts in any direction, usable by any group strong enough to enforce its will upon another. Here freedom and equality are not incompatible, as is often claimed, but mutually interdependent. Freedom loses its meaning whenever we are not equal in our right to enjoy it.

MOREOVER, Lincoln saw quite clearly that there are no permanent way stations — **none** — between slavery and full citizenship. Freedom is contradicted not by slavery alone, but by any denial of the rights that freedom confers. Second-class citizenship in all its forms and guises is merely a variant of slavery. The pointer will not rest indefinitely between one end of the scale and the other. Our choice in the matter is limited to deciding which end of the scale we want. One end, toward which we are now clumsily and painfully moving, is that of full and unstinting application of the ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence. It means completing the task begun one hundred years ago and deferred until recently. It is the high ground in the sunlight upon which Lincoln's eyes and hopes were fixed.

The other end of the scale is within our grasp, too. It is deceptively easy to get there, by slow degrees. First we convince ourselves that "the pendulum has swung too far," and "freedom has to be earned," and "you cannot legislate morality," and "what goes on down there is none of our business," and "each community ought to be allowed to solve its problems without outside interference." Then we frown on agitation, prohibit demonstrations, and accept the notion that police dogs, cattle prods, night sticks, and gas are permissible ways for a community to "solve its problems without outside interference." We identify all opposition to this as un-American, illegal, and fair game. We declare martial law in our cities to keep the ghettos in line, recruiting our emergency police from that most available element, the goon-squad element in white society.

Soon, in the interest of stability and order, we will amend the Constitution to make room for different classes of citizens; state laws will be passed to take care of related matters. By this time, we are in the realm of compounds, the pass system, and "detention camps." And the ultimate stopping-place is at hand, reached so imperceptibly as to be almost painless for those who keep their eyes and their minds properly closed — the stopping-place symbolized by the jackboot, the midnight arrest, the long laden trains moving by night, and the row of gas ovens inside the barbed wire enclosures at Buchenwald and Dachau. We will have lost some ten per cent of our population and one hundred per cent of our soul. The Germans called it "the Final Solution."

SINCE the end of the Civil War coincided with the death of the Civil War

President, and since war and President gave meaning each to the other, it is fitting to close the Centennial with another look at Abraham Lincoln. He was, first of all, an unsurpassingly eloquent champion of American democratic values, recognizing that this nation was in fact conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The original commitment was reaffirmed and extended during the Civil War, and after decades of evasion the nation has once again begun to apply ideals that are meaningless unless universal.

Lincoln also reaffirms the values inherited from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. (And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love. No sacrilege is intended by the observation that is pursuit of his goal Lincoln, too, brought not peace but a sword.) It was Lincoln who reminded us that redressing a wrong is a form of atonement frequently attended by suffering; if every drop of blood drawn with the lash must be paid by another drawn with the sword — or, in modern terms, if every hurt inflicted by the application of prejudice must be paid by another inflicted in the dismantling of it — why, then, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

And finally, Lincoln's belief in freedom did not stop at the water's edge. The American experiment was a banner of hope for all humanity, and freedom's success in the United States brought it measurably closer to attainment elsewhere. It is significant that in every corner of the globe Lincoln quickly became — and remains — by far the best-loved and most admired of American figures. He belongs not merely to the ages, as Edwin Stanton allegedly remarked after Lincoln's death, but to all mankind. The novelist Tolstoi's encomium did not strike the rest of the world as undue exaggeration. Remarking that Lincoln's heroic stature derived from "peculiar moral powers and greatness of character," Tolstoi felt that the Emancipator "was what Beethoven was in music, Dante in poetry, Raphael in painting, and Christ in the philosophy of life." Lincoln's appeal is as universal as his love of freedom, which derived from a belief in the basic dignity and worth of the individual. All individuals, everywhere on earth.

This is the challenge of the epoch. Mark it well. It is a lofty aspiration, and like the precepts of the Almighty it will prove a stern taskmaster. Civilization — not brute existence, but **civilization** — will survive on no other basis. And in this context we have it yet in our power to make America what it was to Lincoln and his era. The choice is ours, as it was theirs, and Lincoln, as usual, found the words: "We can nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth."

Courtesy N. Y. Public Library

'Their Physical Dissimilarities Made Them Look Funny as a Team; Their Personalities Endeared Them to Three Generations of Movie Audiences. . .'

LAUREL & HARDY

An Appreciation

By Joel Najman

A distinctive aspect of the 1964-65 Middlebury College Concert-Film Series is the half-hour short comedies preceding each feature film. These black and white shorts, some silent and some sound, were filmed and released by the Hal Roach Studios between 1926 and 1940, and featured the team of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

Laurel was born Arthur Stanley Jefferson in London in 1888. Both his parents were vaudeville entertainers, and almost as soon as he was able to walk he became part of the act. By age twenty the young Mr. Jefferson had become a master of the mime. He toured England in a pantomime troupe known as the "Mumming Birds," and for two years he was understudy and close associate of another young man destined for greatness, Charles Chaplin. The early part of the century found both Chaplin and Laurel (a stage name that eventually became his legal name) in the United States in search of bigger fortune in the new medium of the cinema. The influence of Chaplin's famous tramp can be seen in Laurel's first movies, filmed on Long Island in 1917. Laurel possessed the same acrobatic physique and grace of movement that elevated Chaplin's little tramp to cinematic immortality. Whether Stan Laurel would have achieved the same fame as Chaplain portraying a similar character is questionable, although it is a fact that Laurel created a character as polished as Chaplin's initial attempts, and unlike Chaplin's many unsuccessful imitators, he did so before Chaplin gained recognition. Laurel soon left the New York studios for California where he acquired a job as script writer and editor at the Hal Roach Studios. It should be pointed out that in those days most short comedies were designed to be little more than evanescent cartoons, and for the most part were totally without plot or format. Extras were hired off the street, pies were thrown, autos were wrecked, and the camera rolled on. It was the job of the editor to piece together the day's footage into a half hour story with a modicum of coherency. It was at this task that Stan Laurel's incredible sense of timing and audience reaction became manifest. The Roach comedies began to stand out among the slapstick shorts of the day. Stan possessed an ingenuity of divising comedy routines that were closely derived from the pitfalls of our everyday existence, for he felt that the more closely one could identify with a comical routine, the funnier the routine.

Collection of the Author

STAN LAUREL AND OLIVER HARDY attempt to sell Christmas trees in July in "Big Business," released in 1926.

ONE of Roach's "regulars" was Oliver Norvell Hardy, a rather obese but highly athletic actor who frequently played the villain or "heavy" in the early silents. Before long Stan himself became a regular (in addition to his other duties), and by chance appeared in several films alongside "Babe" Hardy. In Hardy, Stan found the necessary complement to the screen personality that he was evolving. Their physical dissimilarities made them look funny as a team; their personalities endeared them to three generations of movie audiences. Stan was the well-meaning dolt whose childlike naivete and incredible stupidity brought about the catastrophes that befell them both, but always seemed to fall harder on Ollie. Stanley was invariably impervious to all that occurred, his typical response being an inimitable delayed "double take." Oliver's task was to rectify the uncomfortable situations that Stanley created, but due to a stupidity of a different sort — a stupidity stemming from a false sense of superiority and knowledgeability — his efforts usually compounded their dilemma. Ollie's obsessive fetish with manners and delicate etiquette in spite of his physique was entertaining in itself, and the genuine warmth of a forgiving and tolerant personality was effectively transmitted to the audience.

Although the team of Laurel and Hardy was developed before the advent of sound in movies, their success in the transition period that curtailed the careers of many an accomplished comedian was perhaps their greatest achieve-

Mr. Najman, a psychology major and a member of the class of 1966, is aLoyal Fan of Laurel & Hardy.

ment. Why were they able to bridge the gap, while such comedians as Fatty Arbuckle, Harry Langdon, Snub Pollard, and Charlie Chase dropped into obscurity? It can be seen that while other comedians unsuccessfully attempted to alter their established screen characters to the medium of sound film, Stan Laurel technically used sound as an instrument to augment his established brand of humor. Ideas that were ingenious at the time but that have long since become cliches were first tried in the early L & H sound films. The **Film Exhibitor's Herald** reported in 1929:

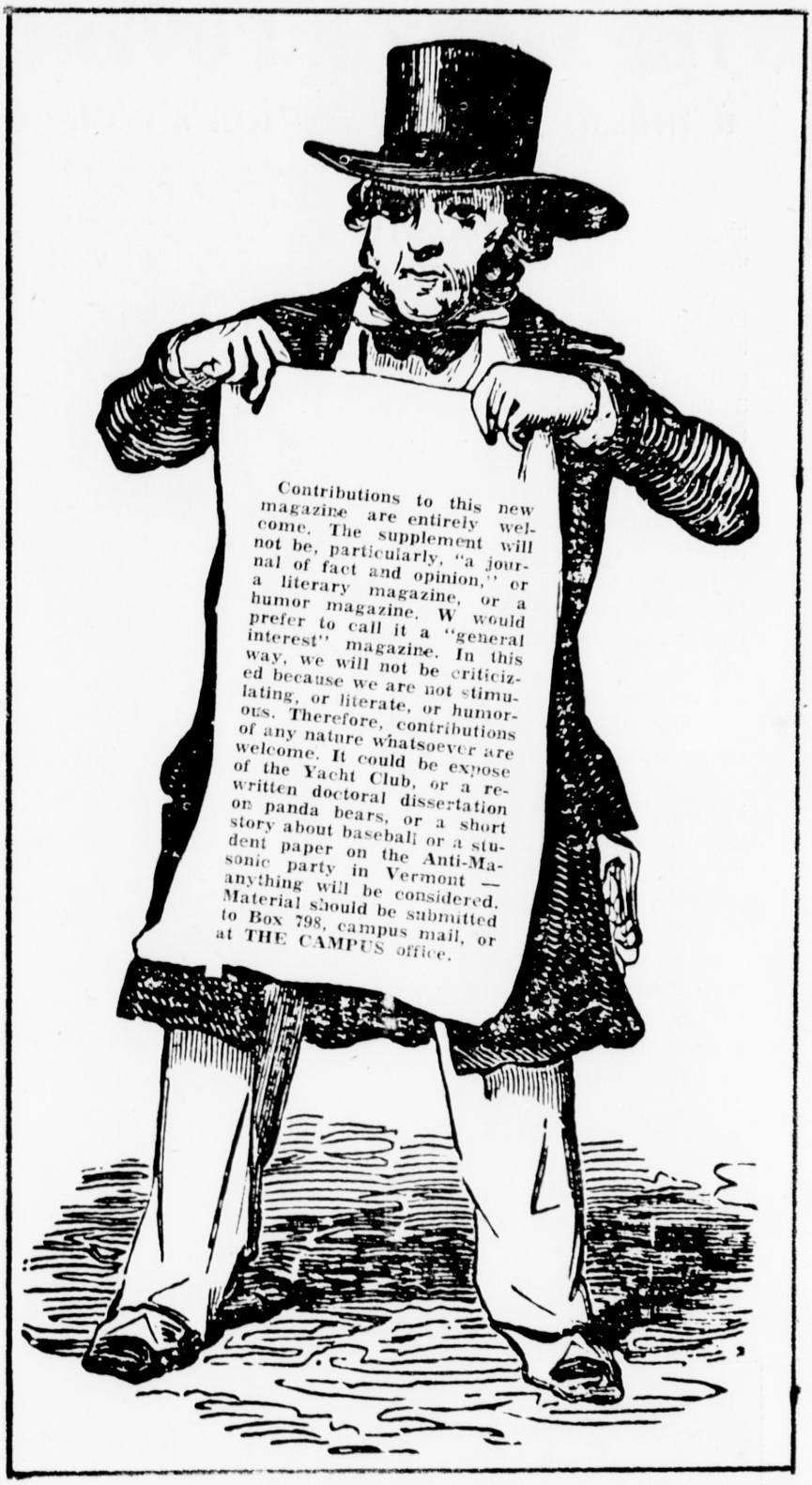
"In one spot Hardy hits Laurel over the head with an automobile jack and the noise from the blow sounded like the ringing of an anvil when struck with a twelve-pound hammer. It is the funniest sound effect yet recorded."

ANOTHER example is the use of sound to induce the viewer's imagination. The camera showed a man slip and dive at the top of a flight of stairs, and disappear out of the camera's range — an instant of silence and then a sudden loud crash. Whereas in a silent film the viewer would be forced to witness the painful details of the stunt man's fall, sound permits him to visualize only the comical aspects of such a fall.

While working for Roach, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy appeared in over one hundred films; in addition Laurel personally supervised the editing, directing, and screenplay of all of them. The polish and quality of the L&H "classics" can be directly attributed to his dedication to the art of the cinema.

FINANCIAL problems forced Laurel and Hardy to quit the Roach Studios in 1940. They did not know it then, but their days of greatness were over. In order to maintain exposure before a new generation of movie goers, they were forced to work for MGM, where the freedom of manipulation so necessary for Stan Laurel's creativity was denied them, and they were fed poorly written scripts and forced to adhere to the rigid direction of talentless men. All of their post - 1940 films (nine features) must be classified as bad. It has been suggested that MGM purposely tried to drum them into oblivion so as to replace the L & H team before the public with two new young MGM "fat and skinny" comedians, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. Unfortunately, these particular films are the ones most frequently seen on television nowadays, due to MGM's massive television distribution.

Laurel & Hardy's last film was made while they were on tour in France in 1950. Oliver died in 1958, and Stan died just recently in California. But as long as there is a projector and a darkened theater, they will be remembered.


Contributions to this new magazine are entirely welcome. The supplement will not be, particularly, "a journal of fact and opinion," or a literary magazine, or a humor magazine. W would prefer to call it a "general interest" magazine. In this way, we will not be criticized because we are not stimulating, or literate, or humorous. Therefore, contributions of any nature whatsoever are welcome. It could be expose of the Yacht Club, or a re-written doctoral dissertation on panda bears, or a short story about baseball or a student paper on the Anti-Masonic party in Vermont — anything will be considered. Material should be submitted to Box 798, campus mail, or at THE CAMPUS office.

The Middlebury Campus
Magazine Supplement

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ALAN MAGARY '66 _____ Editor-in-Chief

THE WAR ON POVERTY:

a message to the Nation's college students...

Inspiring causes have always fired the imagination of students.

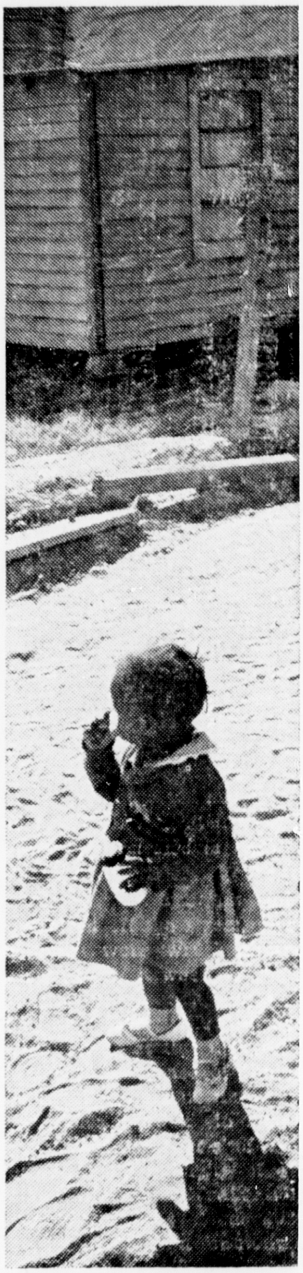
Today the United States is committed to the greatest humanitarian cause in its history—a massive counterattack on the causes of poverty, which are robbing 35,000,000 Americans of the opportunities most of us are free to pursue because we had the advantage of a decent start in life. That start has been denied to one-fifth of the nation's people. Thirteen million of them are children.

This is a moment in history for the fortunate to help the least privileged of their fellow citizens. You can help this summer, or for a full year if you choose, as a volunteer in the War on Poverty.

In July and August, 30,000 volunteers will be needed in their own communities to assist four- and five-year-old children of the poor through Project Head Start Child Development Centers. Thousands more are needed to live and work among poor families by enlisting in VISTA, the domestic Peace Corps.

In Head Start, volunteers work side-by-side with teachers, social workers, doctors, and other professionals to give pre-school children advantages which can change the patterns of their lives. Many of these children have never held a doll, never scribbled with crayons. Meager environments have blunted their curiosity. Some are spoken to so rarely that they are unable to form sentences.

Head Start volunteers will read to children, take them on outings to zoos and parks, organize creative play for them, and help build the security and self-confidence they need to succeed in school. The rewards come when a withdrawn child begins to ask questions or responds to the affection for which he has been starved. Without such help, many of these children would be headed for school failure and the poverty cycle which trapped their parents.



Many young people who are 18 or older and can serve for a year enroll for training in VISTA—both to help others and to enlarge their own capacities for teaching, social work, or careers in sociology, economics, law, and other fields.

Home base for VISTA volunteer groups can be a city tenement row, a struggling farm community, an Indian reservation, a migrant labor camp, or a mental hospital. Volunteers may counsel school dropouts, organize recreation programs, tutor children who are behind in school, explore job opportunities for the poor—in short, do whatever is needed to help people find their way up from poverty. Volunteers become respected members of the communities where they work.

The pay is nominal—living expenses plus $50 a month paid at the end of service. But the opportunities are great: you can help pave the way for an America in which the democratic ideal is big enough to encompass everyone.

Will you lend your abilities to people who live in need? Join the War on Poverty today!

Clip and mail

to: Volunteers
War on Poverty
Washington, D.C.
20506

Send mail to school address ☐

Send mail to home address ☐

Yes, I want to help the War on Poverty!

☐ Please refer me to Head Start programs which will be operating in or near (location)_____this summer.

☐ Please send me information on how I can become a member of VISTA.

Name_____ Age_____

School Address_____

Home Address_____